Pennsylvania Germans Out West

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The Pennsylvania German, besides being the keystone of the Keystone State, is also the co-builder of the great West. On a mid-western trip made last year I met his traces again and again. Not soon shall I forget Hesston College in Kansas, founded by Mennonites and where many students still wear the old sectarian garbs, nor the Dunker College in McPherson College where Prof. H. J. Harnley in the uppermost floor of the building named after him ("Harney Hall") set up a permanent exhibition of touching and significant relics from his ancestral home near Manheim, Pa.: The bonnet worn by his mother's mother, together with the box wherein she kept it; the home-made strawhat he wore when a boy, together with specimens of the straw used in making the hat; a bread-basket and a gaily painted small box; a quilted hand-bag, and a spinning wheel; a cupping instrument, and a man's scarf in violet and white.

Hailing from Pennsylvania himself, Prof. Hailey still used the speech of his forefathers. As a rule the dialect disappears with the first midwest-born generation. In sections where the Pennsylvania Germans are very numerous and where they live somewhat clustered together, outnumbering or even excluding people from other stock, they succeed in keeping their nationality. Strolling through the streets of Goshen, Indiana, we heard a group of women and children talk in German. Upon inquiry they were eager to confirm that they spoke Pennsylvania German, which they assured us to be the daily tongue on many farmsteads in the vicinity of Goshen. They were Mennonites and one of the children, a boy perhaps ten years of age, seemed to be particularly proud of his knowledge of the dialect. Unlike most children in Eastern Pennsylvania he was not a bit hesitant in telling us that he knew more than one language.

Pennsylvania German is still very much alive in Eastern Mid-Ohio. Asking a little "deitscher" lad to pose for a snapshot and arguing that we were glad to have found a small boy who spoke German to perfection we got the reply: "Oh, des gons County is voll von Buwe, wu deitsch schwetze kenne." (We took the snapshot anyway).

A center of what we may call "folksy" features is the little town of Sugar Creek. Here the local weekly, the "Budget," not only has reprinted Boonastiel's letters in the midst of the twenties, but even boasted, until a few years ago, of a dialect-contributor of its own. He is a Dunker by the name of Wm. Horner, living in East Canton, Ohio, and writing over the pen-name of Fritz Schnitzer. When the former editor of the paper retired, Mr. Horner ceased sending in dialect letters. His last letter which was published in the "Budget" of Feb. 28, 1935, ran as follows:

Im Sonnendahl
Den 6ten Yenner, 1935

Lieber Drucker:

Do sin meer bol en holber Monot im nia Yohr froh des meer so goot darchs olta kumma sin un vidder mit hoffnung des es nia yusht en vennich besserra tsita bringt un bissel may jer unser arvet, un kummer.

Es muss noch odlich veel lide hovva des denke des Yohr is der ainsicht dawg im yohr jer forenemma. Besser doo, de tsidunga sin so foll jon ollerhond jerbrechung, shtala, soufa, sht—(!) mocht des de lide vos yada dawga broveera besser layva, era tsite besser awvenna, un may doo jer era navet-mensha, sin gons tsur rahr. Ich glaub, varlich, des von yada monn un fraw in unserm lond de dri socha recht arnshtlich folga dait un may uf Gott drowa un net so feel unf unser uvrichtkeit, don hetta meer vidder goota tsite invennicher des en monots tsite.

Die mommy Lauderbach is endlich tsu era longa ruh gonga. Fer edlicha yohr vor se net gut gavest un hut feel jon der tsite drous in der sonn un frisha luft bringa missa. Ve es lawfa tsu hart gonga is hut se ols uf era porch im shickelshtule odder in der porch-schving de tsite ferdrivva. Foon do hut se de bowerra on era arvet sayna kenna, de lide der vaig gay un de schulekinner on erem gashpeel. Laysa hut se nimma kenna, no hut se feel frade grickt jon tsrick denka on de tsite des se uf sellem grund aw en schule-kind vor un en monnich moul foll tsucker, malossich oder taffy grickt hut om tsucker-hous net vite joon era hammet. Es olt schule-hous, es tsucker-house un de tsucker-bame sin oll fart—long eb se gay hut kenna, ovver blosseerlicha gaydonka darfoo vawra tsiteferdribe in era letschta dawga.

Der Nuchber Schritt vor om ebbel ouslaysa. Si lawda sin bissel tsu deef jer si kartsa arrem. Ve er gons tsrick longa hut vella uf em evvershta lawda is si foos obgashlipt foom unnersht un er hut airs joon ribba ferbrucha. Er koom si tsimlich goot tsu vaig.

Occasionally, however, still a new dialect-letter drops in at the "Budget's" office. The following letter appeared on the 15th of April, 1937. Rev. Lester Hostetler writes to Budget Readers—

Dear Budget Readers:

But there are of course multitudes who find their satisfactions in life only on the lower levels of the physical appetite-eating, drinking, gambling and the like. My good friend C. J. Stahly, formerly from Middlebury, Indiana, is working with a gang of carpenters up in the mountains, a bunch of men, whose religion is in sad need of a revival. Mr. Stahly writes me that they remind him of the story of Huns Sthettel (Dog Town). I pass on his version of the story. Many readers of the Budget will be able to read it:

Do dar anera dawg war ich drunne in Huns Sthettel. De Huns Sthettler sin ein verderbstige ardliche set leit. Yede Haushaldung hat ehre hund, veal hen zva, un der gla Joe Buts hat verhaftig drei. So en gegouts hab ich in meim lebe davor net gehert. Ich hab zva gute geil im wagala ghat un bin ziemlich stharrig gafare. Der John Schmid war bei mir un er hat zurick gegookt un hat de hund mohl gezehlt. Es wara by golla sieben-undzwanzig hund hinner uns off ain mohl.

Was mir so verderbst narrish vor komt is, die Huns-sthettler sin all aurm, hen knops genunk zu esse, viel vonne sin barfusig un zoetlig un halb nackich; un doch halten sie de viele hund. Un sell is net all vas mir so artlich vor komt; alle man in Huns Sthettel kaud un shmoked duvack vie net gsheid. De weibsleit schmoke au. Und der parrah kaud uf der kounsel, es die brie iber der bard nunner lauft. Es hat mich schier gar kotze gmacht. Un all die Huns Sthettler drinke beermenner, weiber, kinner und all. Sie hen zwei werts-heiser, sieben saloone, un ein powerfuller groser duvack-shtore in Huns Sthettel.

To this story I will add the moral: Lasset uns manierlich anschicke. Vann mer ner broviere du was recht is, dan sind mir weis grund net besser es die Huns Sthettler. . . . .

There is one group of Pennsylvania Germans who holds up not only the dialect but even the High German. I am referring to the Amishmen, a colonial group of German-Swiss descent and strongly reinforced from Europe between 1820 and 1830. After having in vain petitioned the Baer publishing house in Lancaster, Pa., to bring out again the German edition of their long-established almanac which was suspended during the World War, they took the matter into their own hands and started a High German almanac in 1930. The title, in 1937, was:

Der Neue Amerikanische Calender
Auf das Jahr unseres Heilandes Jesu Christi
1937
Welches ein gemeins Jahr von 365 Tagen ist.

The editor is Johan Raeber in Baltic, Ohio. The almanac looks quaint and old-fashioned, like the output from some colonial press of olden times.

Preis 12 Cents. Der Jahrgang.

Der Neue Amerikanische

Calender

Auf das Jahr unseres Heilandes Jesu Christi

1937

Welches ein gemeines Jahr von 365 Tagen ist.

Herausgegeben von
Johann Räber, Baltic, Ohio.

Levi A. Miller, who lives on a farm near Arthur, Illinois, is another spiritual leader of the Amishmen. He is the editor of a yearbook which in 1937 bore the title

Amish and Conservative Mennonite
YEAR BOOK AND
DIRECTORY
1937

and was written partly in High German, partly in English, just as their monthly magazine, the "Herold der Wahrheit" in Scottdale, Pa.

Having a high birth-rate, the Amishmen are spreading out all over Eastern Tuscarawas County, Ohio, and deep into the neighboring townships of adjacent counties. The Pennsylvanish language island formed by them is steadily increasing while their neighbors of Pennsylvania German descent adhere less strictly to the old tongue, but are also less successful in conquering new land or even holding their own ground.

The interesting feature that the Pennsylvania German Amishman keeps up the dialect while his neighbors who belong to the same racial stock, but not to his particular denomination, tend to drop the ancestral speech may be observed in Pennsylvania too. Outside of the Kishacoquillas Valley where the Amishmen are clustered, few Pennsylvania Germans of Mifflin County speak the dialect. In the middle part of Lancaster County you may call on a Mennonite farmstead where only the old people still use the dialect while on the neighboring Amish farm the dialect is constantly used by the youngsters, and while on the third farm may dwell a Dunkard family who are monolingual, i.e. English. In this instance the domain within which the dialect lives on, is defined by the boundaries not of a certain section but of a certain religious group. The basis for the dialect becomes sectarian instead of sectional.

The Amishmen do not, as a rule, feel that they form part of the larger commonwealth of Pennsylvania Germandom. Some would not even admit their close kinship with the Mennonites. Said an Amish farmer, referring to his Mennonite neighbors, "Mer kann sie nimi zum Chrischtevolk rechele. Sie belange zur Welt." Thus, the Amishmen form a tribe within the tribe, but indeed a thriving one.